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October 27, 2003

The Honorable Sam Reed
Secretary of State
State of Washington
P.O. Box 40220
Olympia, WA 98504-0220

Dear Sam:

Like many Washingtonians I regret federal court rulings outlawing Washington's open blanket primary which has served our state's voters so well for the past 70 years. The Washington State Legislature must soon consider measures to change or replace our partisan primary election system to meet federal constitutional requirements. As Washington's Secretary of State, your recommendations for new or alternative primary election systems are important. Accordingly, as a longtime friend and supporter, I want you to know why I strongly oppose adopting the so-called Louisiana or Cajun-style non-partisan primary system for Washington State. There are obvious shortcomings and deficiencies of a Louisiana Cajun-style, non-partisan primary from a voter's perspective.

1. **CHOICE NO RADICAL CHANGE NEEDED:** A Cajun-style, non-partisan primary in Washington is a radical departure from our state's traditional partisan election system. It would substantially alter how voters select candidates for partisan political office by removing party affiliation as criteria for winning placement on the general election ballot. Republicans would be denied a ballot position in three out of the past seven general elections in this state. Cajun-style primaries in our state would have eliminated the Republican nominee for Washington's Governor 40% of the time during the past three decades. That would have killed the two party system in our state. Each of those Republican gubernatorial nominees finished third in total primary votes. If I had run in a Cajun-style primary, I would not have been elected Washington's Governor in 1980, nor nominated for Governor in 1976. During the past 24 years, Cajun-style primaries in Washington State would have produced vastly different general election ballots (and perhaps results) in at least seven races for statewide office and in numerous legislative races. Statewide partisan elections for Secretary of State (1980), Lieutenant Governor (1996), State Treasurer (1988) and Governor (1976, 1980, and 1996) would have produced general election run-offs between two candidates of the same party if Washington State had Cajun-style primaries.

In a Cajun-style primary, numerous Washington State legislators from both major political parties would have failed to make the general election ballot. In fact, in 2002, 81 contested legislative races would have been resolved in the primary because one primary candidate polled more than 50% of the primary vote. No general election in 81 races is a radical change from our current system. In our current system, legislators are nominated as partisans and go on to be elected in a partisan general election between candidates of different parties. If in 2002 a Cajun-style non-partisan primary had been held in this state, at least one current, incumbent legislator would not have been elected and 81 legislative contests would have been terminated in the primary. Since 1996 there would have been 16 general election run-offs between two legislative candidates of the same political party. (Please see attached tables for Cajun-style system's impact when applied to past election results.)

2. **DEBATE:** In a Louisiana Cajun-style state primary system, general election voters must pick from one of two run-off candidates who gain the most primary votes regardless of party affiliation. Often those surviving candidates may have the same political ideology, same political affiliations and identical positions on major issues. Washington's general election voters have almost always chosen between party nominees having clear and distinct differences on issues and opposite political philosophies. A general election face-off between political twins would hardly afford all voters their preference. Political diversity and public debate would suffer from Cajun-style primaries producing ballot runoffs between like-minded politicians. Public discourse is stifled when debate between partisan candidates on disputed public policy issues becomes a thing of elections past. Political party affiliation matters. Parties provide a means whereby citizens can organize to express their political differences and vote their preferences. There are no effective minor parties in Louisiana since the advent of the Cajun-style non-partisan primary in 1977 and major parties have been substantially weakened. Fall campaigns and debates amongst partisan nominees for the Legislature would be unnecessary in a majority of legislative districts when one candidate wins 50% of the vote in the Cajun-style primary.
3. **MODERATION & VOTER PARTICIPATION:** Advocates of a non-partisan, Cajun-style primary claim it will bring more independence to elections with candidates less dependent on party dogma and party organizations. However, often in our state, municipal non-partisan primary elections are not really non-partisan. Democrat, Republican, Socialist and Libertarian parties screen and promote candidates for these non-partisan city offices. Louisiana State's primary does not have a moderating influence on that state's political system. On the contrary, Louisiana's primary has produced such polarizing candidates as David Duke and Edwin Edwards. Louisiana's non-partisan primary usually means a crowded primary field of candidates. A multi-candidate Cajun-style primary favors non-moderate, extremist candidates with the strongest core of supporters who share a monolithic ideology or single issue purpose. Washington State voters have a relatively good record for tuning out to vote in past partisan elections. Political parties devote millions of dollars to getting out their vote. Louisiana had the lowest voter turnout in the country for U.S. House elections through the last decade. Congressional incumbents in Louisiana most often do not

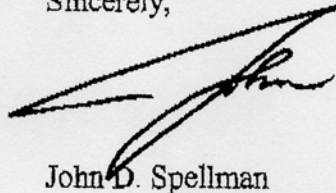
face challengers in general election run-offs having gained a majority vote in the Cajun-primary (two out of seven U.S. House races in Louisiana were uncontested in 1998). All of Washington State's Congress members had opponents on the same year's primary and general election ballots.

4. **CANDIDATE QUALITY & RECRUITMENT:** A Cajun-style nonpartisan primary could substantially weaken the quality of candidates running for and holding elective offices in Washington State by eliminating a political party's most important role: vetting competing candidates for a party's nomination for placement on the general election ballot. Since Cajun-style state primaries are non-partisan, party organizations need no longer aggressively recruit candidates to be on their party's ticket as potential nominees for various partisan offices. Party organizations make a considerable effort to find, recruit and nurture candidates. Nomination by party preference is a weeding-out process that seeks the best candidate.
5. **FUTURE GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP:** Finding and developing future political leaders would be more difficult if Washington adopted non-partisan, Cajun-style primaries. Political parties reflect political preferences on major issues such as the size of government, taxation, abortion, education, law and justice, human rights, economic growth, environment, etc. Party positions on basic issues are the glue that forms majority and minority political positions in this state that equate with power and votes to pass legislation. Partisan bonds on issues help leaders form a consensus behind legislative goals. Without partisan majority rule, which is essential to organizing a democratic government, our currently partisan legislative leaders would be powerless to pass budgets and laws. Party caucuses are the means by which the legislative branch is organized and administered. Appealing to one's own party is the initial means whereby state executives build a *base* of support for an administration's programs and legislative proposals. With partisanship abandoned at the ballot box in a Cajun-style election system, state legislative leaders would lead loosely formed coalitions of members who share the same pure ideology, east-west geography, rural/urban provincialism, religion, ethnicity or some other criteria other than party affiliation. Political parties are far more inclusive as they compete for voters' preferences to become majority parties.
6. **OPEN GOVERNMENT:** Non-partisan Cajun-style primaries would make it far more difficult for voters to determine a candidate's political orientation within the wide political spectrum. Political orientation is held in common by party voters who identify with candidates of the same party or reject candidates of opposing views. Party awareness is something all voters have in common including independent voters or so-called ticket-splitters. Consumers have come to expect truth in product labeling when making retail purchases. In a non-partisan Cajun-style primary, voters do not nominate candidates based on party labels. Washington State has one of the most open, publicly disclosed election systems. The Cajun-style non-partisan primary amounts to closing off general elections to party nominees. In order to win a Cajun-style primary, candidates could hide party identification to gain the maximum number of primary and general election votes.

The Honorable Sam Reed
October 27, 2003
Page 4

There are less sweeping, legal alternatives to our current primary system. These more acceptable alternative primary systems would not radically change partisan outcomes from past elections. Unlike the Cajun-style system, they would increase voter ballot choices and turnout in future general elections. A Louisiana Cajun-style primary is the worst possible of all alternative primary elections systems. Voters want a clear choice between different party nominees in partisan general elections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John D. Spellman", written over a horizontal line.

John D. Spellman

JDS:dlr

Enclosure